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Belgian baking: Chris Berken, food ways coordinator at Heritage Hill State Park, shows how bread was baked in a traditional Belgian summer kitchen bake oven.

Traditions of a Belgian farmstead

By Dian Page
Of the Press-Gazette

The Belgians played an important part in the settling of Northeastern Wisconsin in such areas as Brussels, Duval, Misere, Brussels, Champion and Rosiere.

They were herb growers, and among their favorites were bay leaves, thyme and nutmeg. Rabbits were raised for eating, and they used a chocolate spread much like peanut butter is used today.

It's the families of the early settlers who have kept the Belgian traditions alive with such favorites as Belgian Pie, Tripe (sausage), Jut (cooked cabbage) and Potesse (red cabbage).

Now it's the goal of Heritage Hill State Park to acquaint visitors with some of these customs with its Belgian Farmstead.

The two-story brick home and turn-of-the-century summer kitchen of the farmstead formerly belonged to the Charles Baptiste Massart family at Rosiere. The house was built in 1871 to replace the original log structure destroyed in the Peshtigo Fire.

The hub of activity during the summer months, the kitchen was built away from the house to keep the heat out of the main house. The Massart kitchen, built of limestone with cedar logs in the ceiling, has two windows and a dirt floor.

True to the typical summer kitchen, it also has a bake oven, which projects outside, a wood stove, a forge and a set kettle, a large cast iron kettle set into stone that was used for everything from scalding pigs and washing clothes to cooking stews

and making beer. The kitchen, however, does not have a pump.

As a volunteer with the Heritage Hill Guild, Ruth Hartman has been gathering and organizing history, recipes and traditions of the Belgians to be incorporated at the farmstead.

She points out that the Belgians in Northeast Wisconsin are identified as the Walloons, those who came from the southern half of Belgium known as Wallone. The Flemish Belgians from the northern part of the country settled in southern Wisconsin.

She's taped interviews with men and women who grew up on Belgian farms in the area and learned how the women worked along with the men in the fields. She's learned how they preserved their food in early days and how they celebrated the holidays.

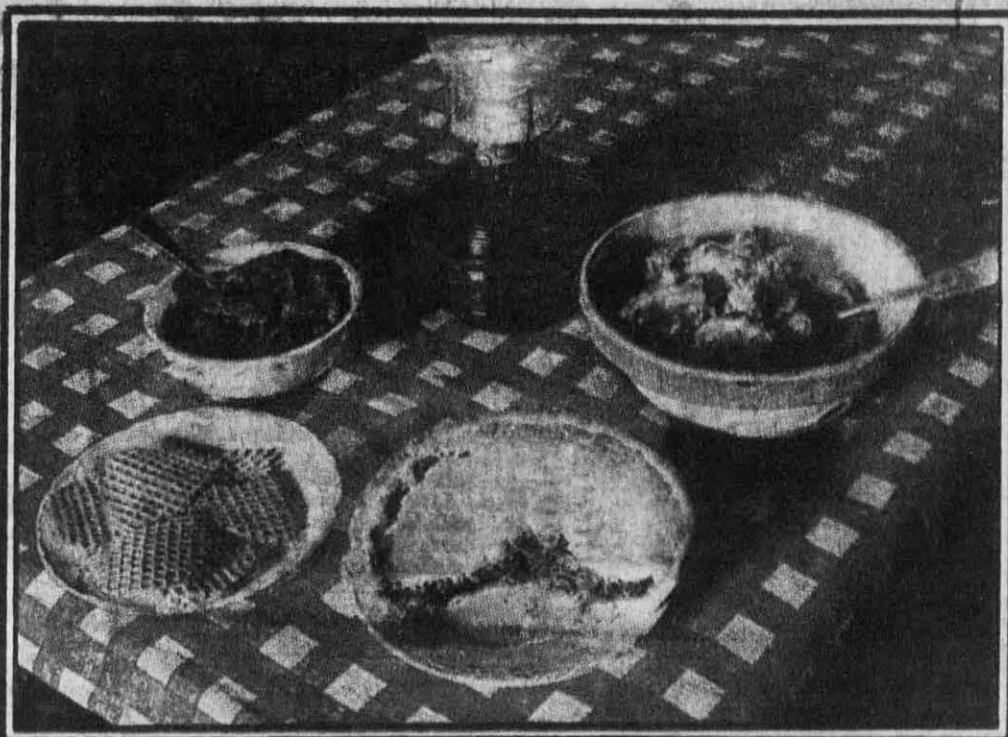
In the days before canning and freezers, cool cellars and crocks played important roles in keeping foods after harvest and through the winter months, says Hartman.

Vegetables were buried in the soil or sand of the cellar floor. Cabbages were lined upside down on a shelf in the cellar.

When smoke houses were accessible, they were used to preserve meats. But more often, Hartman says, pork and beef were preserved in large crocks or barrels with layers of salt or brine. Pork was also fried, put in crocks and covered with grease, then refried when removed to eat.

A cement trough, cooled with water generated

Please see Belgian/Food-2



Tasty: Belgian dishes include, clockwise from bottom, Belgian Pie; the Bona or Gulette, a Christmas cookie made in a special baking iron; applesauce; and Potesse, made of potatoes, red cabbage and side pork.



Dinner: Pictured are, from left, Ruth Hartman, Heritage Hill Guild volunteer; Sandy Kreuger, curator of interpretation; Jennie Massart Merline, whose grandparents owned the farmstead, and Chris Berken.

Recipes

by the windmill, was used to store milk, and bread was kept in crocks to keep fresh.

Eggs were packed in layers of salt in large earthenware crocks and kept in a cool place during the winter months, according to Hartman.

Christmas Day was a Holy Day, without a Christmas tree, Hartman learned in an interview with Louis Bosman of Green Bay. Instead, St. Nicholas Day, Dec. 6, was the "big day." That's when cookies or bread were set out for St. Nick, along with grain for the deer. In return, St. Nick brought gifts of clothing, never toys.

By 1900, Hartman says, Christmas trees appeared in Belgian homes and were trimmed with popcorn and wooden cherries.

Working with Hartman on Belgian foods is Chris Berken, food ways coordinator at Heritage Hill. It's her goal to see to that an entire meal is prepared and eaten at the farmstead, similar to what is done at Tank Cottage, Surgeon's Quarters and Cotton House. At this point, the Belgian farmhouse is not equipped for a meal, according to Berken, who points out the need for dishes . . . "just everything a kitchen needs."

The Bona or Gulette, a traditional Christmas cookie made in an iron baker, will be demonstrated in the summer kitchen weekends during the annual Christmas Festival, Berken says.

Part of the tradition when making the cookie, according to Hartman, is to "crisply" say "One Our Father for one side, one Hail Mary for the other side."

Belgian Waffles were traditional fare on New Year's Day. They were served in bowls with hot milk and cinnamon.

To bring additional living history to the farm, Hartman says the park is looking for persons who know how to make Belgian beer from scratch, make yeast from scratch, and wooden shoes.

Belgian Pie is probably the best known and most popular of the Belgian dishes brought to Northeastern Wisconsin by the early settlers from Belgium.

A popular dish with non-Belgians alike, Belgian Pie can be made with a variety of fillings.

Recipes for Belgian Pie and other Belgian favorites follow. While there are a numerous recipes for the pie, the one that appears is from Irene Rank of Luxemburg. The recipes for the assorted Belgian Pie fillings have been contributed by Holly Kasten of Sturgeon Bay and Grace Renier of Misere.

BELGIAN PRUNE PIE

(Makes 10 to 12 pies)

Base:

¼ compressed yeast from small bar

¼ C. warm water

1 C. milk

1 whole egg

3 egg yolks, well beaten

½ tsp. salt

¾ C. flour

Dissolve yeast in warm water until it bubbles. Scald the milk. Add egg and egg yolks and salt. Stir. Place flour in a large bowl and pour in egg mixture. Stir with wooden spoon to form a soft dough. Let rise until double in size. Grease 10 to 12 pie tins. Butter hands and, taking a piece of dough about the size of a baseball, roll out to fit tin or spread in tin with fingers. Let rise. Pick before putting filling on.

Filling:

4 lbs. prunes

1 C. applesauce (about)

2 lbs. dry cottage cheese

1½ lb. cream cottage cheese

1½ C. sugar

6 egg yolks, not beaten

Little salt

1 tsp. vanilla

Little butter browned and cooled

Cook prunes until tender. Stir in applesauce. Spread filling in crusts. Combine remaining ingredients and spoon over prunes. Bake pies at 350 degrees for 20 to 25 minutes or until crust is golden brown.

WATERZOOIE A LA GAUTOISE

(Chicken Soup)

1 4-lb. stewing chicken

½ C. carrots, sliced

½ C. celery, diced

½ C. fresh or frozen peas

½ C. green beans

1 large potato, cubed

2 onions, cut fine

3 leeks, cut fine

½ lemon, sliced fine

3 bay leaves

4 whole cloves

Salt and pepper

3 tbsp. fresh cream

Parsley, chopped

Cut chicken into serving pieces. Put chicken and all other ingredients except parsley and fresh cream in a large kettle with 4 quarts of water. Bring to a boil and then simmer for 2½ hours. Do not let the broth diminish; add more water occasionally. Add the parsley shortly before serving. Add the cream and stir just before serving. Serve with buttered bread and red wine.

BELGIAN PIE FILLINGS

APPLE: Cook 1 pound apples, peeled and cored, with a little water until tender. Run through grinder. Add sugar to sweeten and cinnamon to taste. Filling for 3 pies.

RICE: Cook 1 pound rice in a double boiler with enough milk to keep rice moist. When rice is soft, add 2 eggs, ¾ cup sugar, dash salt, ½ teaspoon cinnamon, 1 tablespoon vanilla and ½ cup thick cream.

BONA OR GULETTE

(Mrs. Pat Brunner and Holly Brunner, Green Bay)

1½ C. white sugar

1 C. brown sugar

1 lb. butter

9 large eggs

1 tbsp. vanilla

¾ tsp. salt

5 C. flour

Soften butter and add sugar. Combine remaining ingredients, mix and put dough in refrigerator. When chilled, butter hands and form dough into small balls about the size of marbles. Put into pan and return to refrigerator. Bake in an iron baker on stove top. Suggestion for determining baking time: Say one Our Father for one side, one Hail Mary for the other side.

POTESSE

(Red Cabbage)

(Mrs. Harrison Brehme, Green Bay)

Medium head of red cabbage

1 apple, peeled and sliced

7 lbs. potatoes, cooked and diced

Salt and pepper to taste

1 lb. side pork

Coarsely slice red cabbage. Add apple and mix 2 part of diced with the potatoes. Add salt and pepper to taste. Add water, not enough to cover; enough to see cabbage. If too much is used, some can be poured off. Boil until tender. Fry side pork, dice and add to cabbage with some of the drippings. Mash all together with potatoes. Taste. Add more salt or drippings if needed.

TRIPE

(Elmer Barrett, Green Bay)

10 lbs. ground pork

5 lbs. ground beef

15 lbs. cabbage, boil and grind

1 lb. onions, grind

Mix together. Add salt and pepper. Put in sausage casings. Boil 5 minutes. Cool and freeze. To serve, fry in butter.

BELGIAN CAPMIQUE

(Christmas Loaf)

1 pkg. yeast, compressed or dry

1 C. water, (lukewarm for compressed, warm for dry yeast)

1 C. milk

½ C. sugar

1 tsp. salt

1 tsp. ground cardamom

½ C. butter

7 C. sifted enriched flour (about)

1 C. seedless raisins

2 eggs

1 egg, beaten

1 tbsp. water

Confectioner's sugar icing (optional)

Soften yeast in water. Scald milk. Add sugar, salt, cardamom and butter. Cool to lukewarm. Add 2 cups flour and beat well. Add softened yeast, raisins and 2 eggs. Add enough of the remaining flour to make a soft dough. Turn out on lightly floured board or pastry cloth and let rise in warm place until doubled (about 1½ hours). When light, punch down. Divide dough into 2 equal portions. Let rest 10 minutes. Shape each portion into a round loaf. Place in greased 9-inch round pans. Let rise until doubled, about 1 hour. Mix egg and water. Brush lightly over tops of loaves. Bake at 375 degrees for 40 to 45 minutes. Cool. Frost, if desired.

JUT

(Cooked Cabbage)

1 med. head of cabbage (Savoy or curly)

2 to 3 thin slices of salt pork

1 med. onion

Croutons (optional)

Salt and pepper

Pinch nutmeg

Cut cabbage and onion in quarters and cook together until tender. Drain cabbage and let it cool; then squeeze out all the water until the cabbage is quite dry. Chop cabbage very fine. Fry salt pork in a large skillet until crisp. Add cabbage to skillet and simmer slowly until heated through. Season with salt, pepper and nutmeg to taste. Top with croutons

RABBIT STEW WITH PRUNES AND RAISINS

1 rabbit

4 onions

2 carrots

2 tbsp. flour

½ C. sliced side pork

3 C. water or beer

¼ C. butter

2 tbsp wine vinegar

1 C. stewed prunes

½ C. raisins

1 bay leaf

Salt, pepper, nutmeg

Cut the rabbit into pieces. Marinate with vegetables, liquid and seasonings overnight. Remove rabbit pieces and brown with butter and side pork. Add flour and marinade so the rabbit is covered. Bring to a boil. Add prunes and raisins. Cover and simmer for one hour. Serve with small amount of melted butter.